

ASK THE



Expert
Your pressing questions...

- Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVBs): What CVBs Can Offer You...



Shadia Cook, a veteran of the hospitality industry, is experienced in coordinating conferences with corporate, government and association meeting professionals.

Have a pressing question? Ask Shadia! Write to Editor@MidwestMeetings.com.

Q: ■ How can a Convention & Visitor Bureau (CVB) help me? Do I have to pay them for their services?

A: ■ Most cities and regions have a Convention and Visitors Bureau. They exist to help not only individual travelers, but also meeting professionals and convention planners. The majority of services are complimentary.



Finding local transportation options can be challenging when you're not familiar with the city. Ask your CVB about your options, including group transportation and individual options. Some cities offer unique modes of transportation that can be a fun touch to your event.

A CVB can be helpful at the earliest stages of planning. For example, if you are contemplating different cities, you can submit your Request for Proposal (RFP) to the individual cities you are looking at. Not only can the CVB respond with their available services, they can also send out your RFP to local hotels and convention centers, collect and compile the proposals and send them to you for review. This is a great time and money saver for planners. Keep in mind though that most CVBs are unable to tell you which facilities are the best or which venues may be less than desirable. It is still important to do your own visit to see your options.

CVBs can also help set up your site visits and familiarization (FAM) stays. Depending on the size of your event, anticipated revenue and the CVBs budget, they may be able to cover your expenses to visit their city. It is common that the hotel(s) that you are considering will also be able to offer you a complimentary stay. Your CVB can easily arrange this for you, as well as prepare an itinerary for your visit and accompany you acting as your personal tour guide.

Many CVBs also offer assistance with media for your event. They can help with local and regional media, as well as with press releases and even organize a welcome from local dignitaries.

Chris Church, Bureau Services Manager, Fox Cities CVB, looks forward to unusual requests and extending some Midwestern hospitality.

“We love the groups that give us a challenge. We’ve been asked to help find a place to hide a body (dummy, of course!) for a group of forensic investigators. Most important, we provide services to all our groups large and small. We had a group of seven people attending a military reunion and they were coming to the Fox Cities because one of their members, who lived here, was too sick to travel. The planner was actually in California. He asked if we could request a greeting from the mayor. We arranged that.”

If you are planning on doing some group and individual tours of the area, CVBs can help create recommended itineraries, act as a liaison between you and the various places the tour includes and

even arrange for a tour guide.

They may also be able to help arrange for group discounts at local establishments such as restaurants, stores, and other tourist attractions.

Linda Briden, Vice President Sales & Marketing of Visit Topeka, prides their CVB as being customer service driven and innovative for their groups, “Visit Topeka prides itself on our level of service to our customers. From our complimentary visitor information to personalized tours and activities, the Visit Topeka staff is ready to make any event unique and memorable. Our goal is to go above and beyond to make every event special. For the American Boxer Club site tour committee we ordered personalized doggie treats from a local business that specializes in healthy homemade treats for pets. We have organized babysitting and inflatable jumpers to entertain children, arranged for chair massages for expo attendees, arranged for one group to hold their opening session in the Kansas House of Representatives Chambers and themed Wizard of Oz events. That’s just a taste of what we can do for any group.”

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Depending on the size and potential impact on a community, it might be an option to ask the CVB to host or co-sponsor a welcome reception, or even do a promotion at the prior year’s convention.

Housing and registration are a vital part of your program and event. Ask your CVB if they have online housing programs, onsite registration staff and welcome bags for attendees with information on the city.

CVBs offer a wide range of services and can easily become the meeting planner’s best friend. Next time you are planning your conference or meeting, contact the local CVB to help make your event especially memorable!

